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SUBJECT: SAY IT ISN'T SO: BASEBALL GAME-FIXING SCANDAL ROCKS TAIWAN

¶1. Summary. Taiwan's devoted baseball fans have been thrown a curve ball by a high-profile baseball scam involving players accused of throwing games for betting syndicates. Thus far, ten people, including a catcher and a coach, have been arrested in this, the second professional baseball scandal in Taiwan in the past decade. In response to the groundswell of public outrage, Taiwan's Chinese Professional Baseball League (CPBL) and lawmakers vowed to stamp out illegal gambling on baseball and game-fixing by tightening security, cutting down on the number of foreign players hired, and establishing a nationwide lottery betting on foreign sports events. While game attendance dropped significantly in the week after the scandal was revealed, CPBL and baseball-loving legislators hope that the reforms will cause Taiwan's passionate baseball fans once again to forgive their baseball heroes and return to the stadium. End Summary.

¶2. After a yearlong investigation by the Criminal Investigation Bureau (CIB), ten people were arrested in late July for participation in a game-fixing ring that paid pitchers and catchers in cash (up to NT \$160000, equivalent to US \$5000) or kind (sexual services) to throw games. To date, only two people, a team coach and a catcher, remain in police custody. At this point, prosecution against gang leaders for organizing illegal gambling seems to be unlikely. According to police estimates, the ring made NT\$100 million (US \$3.1 million) over the past year. Two Americans, La New Bears third baseman Victor Rodriguez and Sinon Bulls pitching coach Jeffrey Andra, have been questioned and placed on the CPBL's "watch list," but have denied involvement in the scam.

Baseball on the Island

¶3. Taiwan's Chinese Professional Baseball League (CPBL), founded in 1989, has been the island's only professional league since its 2003 merger with the Taiwan Major League. The six-team league was hit by a game-fixing scandal in 1997, when 18 players, a manager, and two bookmakers were convicted and jailed, shocking the sport's rabid fans and sending the sport's popularity into a dive. In recent years, however, baseball regained its popularity in Taiwan after Chen Chin-feng joined the Los Angeles Dodgers, the "Chinese Taipei" team defeated its Japanese counterpart in the 2001 World Cup and made the 2004 Olympics, and most recently, pitcher Wang Chien-ming joined the New York Yankees

¶4. As one of the few sports at which Taiwan athletes excel in world competition, baseball is Taiwan's national sport and a source of pride for this island, which has experienced so many diplomatic humiliations and setbacks. Because baseball holds such a prominent place in the hearts of the people of Taiwan, the game-fixing scandal was received with great shock and disillusionment.

Sports Betting and the Future of Baseball

¶5. CPBL rushed to condemn those involved in the scandal and vowed to prevent future scandals. The league announced new rules, including banning for life any player or coach taken into police custody with police evidence of involvement in the scandal. In a bow to public image, those questioned or named by the media will be put on an "observation list." DPP legislator Bi-Khim Hsiao, herself a passionate baseball fan from her childhood in the U.S., told AIT that a major problem is that foreign players stay in Taiwan for short periods of time, do not develop a "long-term moral burden or responsibility" to Taiwan baseball and, thus, are more susceptible to bribes and corruption. Reflecting this widely held belief, CPBL rules next year will reduce from four to two the number of foreign players permitted to play on each team. Furthermore, Hong Ruei-Ho, the CPBL acting commissioner, said that the league would try to hire mainly players from the U.S. and Japan, since players from Latin America are "too difficult to manage and have caused many headaches with their off-field activities." Hong explained that his beliefs were based on reported cases and police

evidence. Richard Wang, CPBL's Director of Public Relations, told AIT that CPBL plans to ramp up security at stadiums and at hotels where players stay in order to prevent gangs and gambling rings from making contact with players.

16. Baseball-loving legislators have also stepped in to try their hand at preventing baseball game-fixing and illegal gambling in the future. Hsiao told AIT that sports is one of the few areas in which government funding has increased in recent years because many legislators believe that, as an advanced modern nation, Taiwan needs a well-developed sports culture. Reducing corruption in sports, therefore, is a top priority for these interested lawmakers. Liu Teng-cheng, Director-General of the National Treasury Agency, announced that the Ministry of Finance will direct the National Council on Physical Fitness and Sports to draft regulations to establish a government-sponsored sports lottery, which it hopes will curtail illegal gambling. Once the regulations are approved by the Cabinet, the Ministry plans to launch the sports lottery by next year, with profits earmarked to support Taiwan's athletic events. LY member Hsiao said this would begin with foreign events and possibly expand to include local events. She said that it is important to offer gamblers an outlet that would not increase the incentives to fix games.

17. CPBL's Wang told AIT that before the scandal, baseball games in Taiwan typically attracted around 3000 people. Since the scandal, however, the number of attendees has dropped to an average of 2200 per game. TV viewer ratings for games also have dropped. In addition to plans for reform, CPBL is also planning activities to encourage fans to return to games. Starting next week, it will invite "role model" players, who have refused bribes, to make pre-game talks to fans. CPBL will also encourage fans attending games to urge the President and lawmakers to crack down on illegal gambling. Wang lamented that Taiwan law enforcement agencies do not take illegal gambling seriously, a problem demonstrated by the release of eight of the ten people arrested in the scandal. He also said CPBL was pushing for the government to increase the punishment for illegal gambling, since CPBL itself has no way to punish those that participate in gambling rings and game-fixing. CPBL has also named a new commissioner, Tseng Chi-lang, who is the vice president of Academia Sinica and the former Ministry of Education. CPBL Hung and DPP legislator Hsiao hope that Tseng can lead the way in cleaning up the league.

Comment: Scandal Reflects the Problem of Corruption

18. Taiwan's latest baseball scandal is another product of the corruption that has become endemic in Taiwan over the past decade. Although recent governments have made anti-corruption a priority, there has been little real progress. The fact that the current scandal closely mirrors the 1997 scandal demonstrates that progress against corruption has been minimal. A number of legislators have been publicly accused of close ties with betting kingpin Tsai Wen-pin, a major figure in the current baseball

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scandal, and other black gang (heibang) leaders. The scandal has damaged Taiwan baseball's image and fans' confidence, even as Taiwan looks forward to hosting the 2009 World Games and prepares its application for the 2020 Summer Olympic games.

(Prepared by POL Intern Angela S. Wu)